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December 3, 2008

The Honorable President-Elect Barack Obama
Office of Presidential Transitions
Washington D.C., 20270

Dear President-Elect Obama:

On behalf of the nationwide network of nearly 12,000 Parents as Teachers professionals and the 300,000 children we serve, we offer our warm congratulations on your election. Parents as Teachers National Center is thrilled with your commitment to improving early childhood education for our nation's children and we look forward to working with you to make this a reality.

As the nation's largest evidence-based early childhood home visitation program, we respectfully offer the following policy recommendations for your consideration as you shape your early childhood education policy agenda.

• ***Expand early childhood home visiting services by enacting the Education Begins at Home Act***

Evidence-based home visitation services, such as Parents as Teachers, make a real difference in the lives of children and families by promoting school readiness, increasing long-term school achievement, enhancing parental involvement, reducing child abuse and neglect and increasing health outcomes for children and pregnant women. Despite these proven outcomes, only a small percentage of American families with young children are able to receive home visiting services due to insufficient program funding.

The Education Begins at Home Act would establish the first dedicated federal funding stream to support quality, voluntary home visiting programs for parents with young children. Rather than mandating that states implement a specific home visitation model, this bill gives states the authority to implement a range of evidence-based home visitation approaches that best meet the needs of the families in their state. With strong bipartisan, bicameral Congressional support, the Education Begins at Home Act is poised for speedy enactment in the new Congress.

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We recommend that the Obama-Biden administration include the Education Begins at Home Act as a key component of the administration's early childhood legislative agenda.

(In the 110th Congress: S667 and HR2343)

- ***Establish a more inclusive definition of evidence-based home visitation programs***

Parents as Teachers National Center fully supports the emerging state and federal policy trend of funding “evidence-based” home visitation programs to ensure that participating families receive high quality services that produce measurable outcomes. However, we have serious concerns about narrowly defining evidence-based programs with the rigid standard of multiple randomized control trials (RCTs).

We believe that RCT is not always the most appropriate and the best method for research and evaluation of social programs. Expert opinion also supports this position. There are legal, ethical, and financial situations which may make RCT difficult to pursue. William M.K. Trochim, Professor in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management at Cornell University, estimates for example, that RCTs “are probably appropriate in no more than 10% of the social research studies that attempt to assess causal relationships.” In addition, Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford University stated in a 2002 commentary in *Educational Researcher* that “the usefulness of small, comparison group studies--as well as large correlational studies that use grosser measures--is not in the definitiveness of their individual findings but in their contribution to a larger body of work from which evidence can be triangulated.” Other eminent researchers, such as Deborah Stipek, professor and Dean of the School of Education at Stanford University, also argue that RCT is only one of many “methods” in research and evaluation, and that the credibility of research should not be based on a single research design. For example, using only RCT, researchers may not be able to answer the more qualitative question of, “what works the best for whom in what situation.” A March 2008 report from the Evaluation Policy Task Force of the American Evaluation Association that comments on the OMB PART process also lays out a clear and convincing argument for adopting a more inclusive definition.

In sum, we urge the administration to adopt a more inclusive definition of evidence-based home-visiting programs.

- ***Expand home visiting services to families facing unique challenges***
 - **Family, Friend, Neighbor Caregivers:** The most common type of child care for children under 5 is provided by family, friend and neighbor (FFN) caregivers. Parents choose FFN care because of the special relationships that exist between the caregivers and the children,



the cultural continuity between home and care setting, and the more flexible schedule for working parents. Despite these benefits, many of these settings do not adequately address health and safety concerns or provide the enrichment of high quality care settings. There is increasing interest in supporting FFN care providers of young children. One effective way of doing this is through home visits with these providers. Providing FFN care providers with essential child development information and helping them to improve the quality of care and enhance the environment in which children are being raised will also help ensure that children are stimulated during their most important time of brain development.

We recommend expansion of programs that fund quality home visitation programs, such as Parents as Teachers, to provide FFN caregivers with specialized home visits to support their work.

- **Military families:** The strains of parenting are perhaps felt most keenly by our military families who must deal with life threatening danger, multiple deployments, repeated moves, and separation from extended family. Almost half of all active duty members have children and nearly 40 percent of these children are under 5. More than a third of first-time military parents are 21 years old or younger; many are living apart from extended family. These families deserve support to help them in their role as parents.

Parents as Teachers National Center has entered into a partnership with the Department of Army to provide parenting support services to young military parents through a program called Heroes at Home. This uniquely tailored program provides specialized home visiting services for military families that address their unique needs.

We recommend that this program be brought to scale so that military families in all service branches, including the Guard and Reserve, who have children up to kindergarten entry age will be able to benefit from these home visitation services.

- ***Expand existing education-related funding streams benefiting children and families***
 - **Parental Information and Resource Centers:** Research demonstrates that parental involvement in children's learning positively impacts school achievement, particularly when parents become involved during the early years of their child's life. Parental Information and Resource Centers provide leadership, technical assistance, and financial support to nonprofit organizations and local



educational agencies so they can implement successful and effective parental involvement policies, programs, and activities leading to improvements in student academic achievement. Recognizing the importance of early parental involvement in education, the authorizing legislation requires recipient organizations to dedicate 30% of their funds to early childhood parent education programs, such as Parents as Teachers.

We recommend that funding for Parental Information and Resource Centers be significantly increased to increase parental involvement in education beginning in the early years.

(Title V, Part D, Subpart 16 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965)

- **Even Start:** Learning to read and write is essential to success in school and throughout life. Beginning at birth parents can play a critical role in helping their children build literacy skills by providing an environment rich in language and literacy interactions. Using Even Start funds, local school districts and community organizations help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by working directly with families who have children 7 years of age and younger to improve their literacy skills. Each Even Start project must include home visitation services, such as Parents as Teachers. Even Start funding has been reduced by more than 70% from FY02 to FY08, which has significantly impacted the number of families receiving services.

We recommend that Even Start funding be increased to the FY03 level of \$250 million.

(Title I, Part B Subpart 3 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965)

- **Native American Families:** Most Native American families are isolated and without transportation. Half of the children live in poverty and have no books in the home. They reach school less ready to learn than their peers. Home visitation is the best way to reach these families and level the playing field for high-risk American Indian children entering kindergarten.

The Family and Child Education (FACE) program, which uses the Parents as Teachers home visitation model, provides Native American families with children up to the age of kindergarten entry, with culturally sensitive parenting information, support and the encouragement they need to help their children develop optimally during the crucial early years of life.



We recommend that funding in the Department of Interior be increased so all Native American families will have access to FACE home visitation services.

We thank you for the opportunity to present these recommendations for your consideration. Parents as Teachers National Center and our nationwide network of early childhood professionals stand ready to work with your administration and the 111th Congress to expand services for families and children so all children will be able to realize their full potential.

Sincerely yours,

Susan S. Stepleton
President and CEO